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October 12, 2016

NEWS RELEASE

Third Travel-Associated Case of Zika Virus

Department urges mosquito bite prevention despite cooler weather

EL PASO, Texas – The City of El Paso Department of Public Health (DPH) announced today the confirmation of the third travel-related case of Zika virus in the area. A pregnant woman in her mid-30s tested positive for the virus following travel to South America.

"This report comes during a time when our weather seems to be cooling down," said Fernando Gonzalez, Lead Epidemiologist. "We need to consider that mosquitoes that could transmit this disease are still active, and that all the cases we've seen locally so far have come from travel to other countries," he said.

The DPH is encouraging anyone who may be traveling to Zika-affected regions including certain areas of Florida, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Pacific Islands, Asia, and U.S. territories to take strict precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes. Because Zika can also be transmitted sexually, anyone who travels to a Zika-affected area should either abstain from sexual activity, or use condoms correctly and consistently for the following amount of time.

- Men with possible Zika virus exposure, regardless of symptom status, should wait at least 6 months from symptom onset (if symptomatic) or last possible exposure (if asymptomatic) before attempting conception with their partner. They should also wait at least 6 months before having condomless sex to minimize their risk for sexual transmission of Zika virus to partners.
- Women with possible Zika virus exposure are recommended to wait to conceive until at least 8 weeks after symptom onset (if symptomatic) or last possible Zika virus exposure (if asymptomatic).
- To protect the unborn fetus from possible birth defects, such as microcephaly, persons who have traveled to or lived in an area with active Zika virus transmission and whose partner is pregnant should consistently and correctly use condoms during sex or abstain from sex for the duration of the pregnancy.
- Additionally, non-pregnant women of childbearing age who travel, or who have a male partner who travels, to a Zika-affected region, should talk with their healthcare providers about their pregnancy plans and take steps to avoid any unintended pregnancy, including correct and consistent condom use.

Zika virus is a generally mild illness that is spread primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. Common symptoms of Zika virus disease are fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis (red eyes), lasting

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Promote Transparent and Consistent Communication Among All Members of the Community

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from several days to one week. An infected patient's blood can remain infectious to mosquitoes for up to two weeks.

The following prevention methods are highly encouraged to prevent many mosquito-borne diseases including Zika and West Nile virus:

- Apply EPA-approved insect repellent. (Follow manufacturer's instructions.)
- Wear pants and long-sleeve shirts that cover exposed skin. In warmer weather, wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing that covers exposed skin.
- Use screens or close windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out of your home.
- "Tip and Toss" - Remove standing water in and around the home. This includes water in cans, toys, tires, plant saucers, and any container that can hold water.
- Cover trash cans or containers where water can collect.
- To avoid infecting local mosquitoes, people who travel to areas with active Zika transmission take steps to prevent mosquito bites for at least three weeks after they return to Texas – and longer if they develop an illness that could be Zika.
- To report standing water or other mosquito breeding sites, please call 3-1-1.

Outreach efforts to combat Zika and the mosquitoes that transmit the disease began locally here in El Paso in February after an outbreak was detected in Brazil. Informational materials continue to be made available and are updated on the webpage located at: <http://www.elpasotexas.gov/public-health/current-events/zika-viruspage>. We continue to offer educational presentations to local groups through our Speakers Bureau.

The mission of the Department of Public Health is to provide research and evaluation, prevention, intervention, and mobilization services to the people of El Paso so they can be healthy, productive, safe, and secure. For more information on the programs and services offered by the Department of Public Health, visit EPHealth.com or dial 2-1-1.

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